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ABSTRACT

The Massachusetts Board of Education Task Force on Public School Youth, Education, and Employment concluded that, in general, the structure of effective policy in the area of preparing youth for employment was already in place. Given changes in workplace requirements and problems schools currently face, however, it was determined that the State Board needed to revise its policies regarding youth employment preparation. The Task Force recommended specifically that the State Board (1) set statewide goals and standards in basic skills for all grades; (2) include employability skills in the State Basic Skills Improvement Policy; (3) provide the leadership and financial support needed for school youths' employment preparation programs; (4) actively encourage the development of educational partnerships at state and local levels; (5) ensure that all young people have equal access to and equity in programs which prepare them for employment; and (6) ensure internal and external coordination of a comprehensive policy on the preparation of youth for employment. (CMG)

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WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO?

REPORT TO THE MASSACHUSETTS BOARD OF EDUCATION ON THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS IN PREPARING YOUTH FOR EMPLOYMENT

TASK FORCE ON PUBLIC SCHOOL
YOUTH, EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

December 1983

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John H. Lawson, Commissioner of Education

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Department of Education

1385 Hancock Street, Quincy, Massachusetts 02169

January 4, 1984

Dear Colleagues:

The link between schooling and employment is a critical element in the State's economic development. As an expression of its concern that schools adequately prepare youth for employment, the State Board created a Task Force on Public School Youth, Education and Employment in October of 1982 to advise the State Board, local schools, state agencies and the public on ways to improve programs which prepare young people for employment. I am pleased to present to you a copy of the Report.

In December 1983, the State Board received with commendation the Report of the Task Force. In recognition of its challenging recommendations, the Board approved the following plan of action:

1) that Task Force members continue to provide advice to the Board on ways to improve State policy supporting programs that prepare youth for employment;

2) that the recommendations regarding changes in the State's Basic Skills Improvement Policy (#1 and #2) be added to the agenda of public discussion once the Joint Legislative Committee issues its report on education; and

3) that the Department prepare a comprehensive Youth Education for Employment Policy that incorporates the recommendations of this Task Force as well as other recommendations for consideration by the Board in June 1984.

Over the next six months, the Department will be preparing a policy statement as directed. I encourage you, therefore, to take the time to read the findings and recommendations of the Task Force. If you have any comments or recommendations, please send them to my office care of Alan Doyle.

The Department will also be assigning staff to each regional office to facilitate the implementation of many of the recommendations of the Task Force. I suggest that you contact the Director of the Regional Office nearest you for assistance in developing local responses to the recommendations contained in the Report.

Improving the Commonwealth's system for educating youth for employment requires a broad base of involvement by both educators and the public. I hope that you will join with the State Board in contributing to this effort.

Sincerely,

John H. Lawson
Commissioner of Education

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TASK FORCE ON PUBLIC SCHOOL YOUTH, EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Task Force on Public School Youth, Education and Employment studied the problems and issues surrounding the Commonwealth's system of educating and training young people for employment. This final report to the State Board of Education presents the Task Force's conclusions and recommendations on ways to improve the preparation of youth for employment.

The Task Force cited changes in employers' expectations of future workers; identified problems and services; looked at the Board's current policies on youth employment education; and agreed on a set of principles regarding the roles and responsibilities of those who prepare youth for employment. The Task Force found that the Board had addressed schools' responsibilities for preparing youth for employment through several of its present policies. The Task Force concluded that, in general, the structure for effective policy in this area exists. However, given some of the changes in workplace requirements and some of the problems schools currently face, the Task Force determined that the State Board must revise its policies in ways which will provide the framework for an improved system of preparing youth for employment. The Task Force went on to recommend specific revisions in policy and suggest other ways to improve the Commonwealth's youth education, training and employment programs.

The Task Force's recommendations to the State Board of Education for policy changes and further improvements follow:

1. The State Board of Education should set statewide goals and standards in basic skills for all grades:

2. The State Board should include employability skills as a basic skill in the State's Basic Skills Improvement Policy.

3 The State Board should provide the leadership and financial support needed for out-of-school youth employment preparation programs.

4. The State Board of Education should actively encourage the development of educational partnerships at state and local levels.

5. The State Board should ensure that all young people have equal access to and equity in programs which prepare them for employment.

6. The State Board should ensure internal and external coordination of a comprehensive policy on the preparation of youth for employment.

FOREWORD

The State Board of Education created the Task Force on Public School Youth, Education and Employment in October 1982 in response to a growing concern that schools are not adequately preparing their students for employment. The Task Force's charge was to advise the State Board, local schools, state agencies and the public on ways to improve programs which prepare young people for employment.

A complete list of the membership of the Task Force, and the organizations they represent, is included at the beginning of this document. The Task Force has met monthly since December 1982 and, as directed, members have reviewed policies, programs and activities of agencies, including other State Boards of Education, and reviewed research and information on vocational and career education programs and curriculum in relation to job market needs. Task Force members have discussed these materials, identified youth employment problems specific to Massachusetts, and worked to identify concrete solutions.

The Task Force presented an interim report to the State Board in May 1983, which recommended that the State Board set statewide competency standards in the basic skills, develop local work orientation programs and encourage coordinated employment training programs for out-of-school youth. The Task Force also recommended state level leadership and coordination of youth employment programs, encouragement of school-business partnerships and equity in access to all youth employment programs.

This final report outlines the Task Force's concerns about the Commonwealth's current problems in adequately preparing students for employment. It establishes principles upon which new policy and programs should be based, and describes current state policy on youth employment. Finally, it presents a series of recommendations to the State Board of Education on ways to improve policy and programs.

The development of this report was supported by a grant from the National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Education. The grant was made possible by the Northeast Regional Exchange, Inc., a private not-for-profit corporation, which coordinates resources and the sharing of information among the seven state departments of education in the northeast.

INTRODUCTION

Schools, traditionally, have been expected to prepare youth for employment. Schools today, however, are faced with major challenges in living up to this expectation. The shift from manufacturing to a service economy and the dramatic spread of technological innovations, pervading all occupations, leave but one message to educators and the public alike. More education, rather than less, will be required of workers of the future. Work will also require the ability to learn anew as the technology of the workplace changes. The goal of this report is to identify how schools with the support of the family, the community, and the State Board of Education can prepare youth for employment in the 80's and beyond.

The Task Force first identified several problems schools currently face in helping students prepare for employment:

- The quality of basic skill preparation varies from school to school in Massachusetts.
- Over 40% of Massachusetts high school graduates seek employment immediately upon graduation. Proposition 2-1/2, however, has forced schools to eliminate one out of every four guidance counselors, reducing the capacity of most schools to provide job preparation and placement services.
- Too many youth drop out of school before high school graduation, particularly in urban areas.
- Unemployment among minorities is twice the rate of white youth requiring special attention to equity in providing academic and skill specific training.
- Public agencies which historically have cooperated in developing plans to improve youth employment have not given high priority to the implementation of those plans.
- Federal programs that once funded activities to help schools and communities prepare young people for work have lost their impact during the consolidation of programs into the Block Grant.

Although problems confront schools in meeting the expectation of society to help youth make the transition to employment, Task Force members believe that the work can be done. Schools can play a vital role in preparing youth for employment. The challenge has been to consider these and other problems and to determine ways that the State Board can help local school committees and administrators improve the preparation of students for employment.

The Task Force agreed on several broad principles which guided its study of the issue of youth employment and its development of the recommendations included in this report. Task Force members believe that:

- Public education is a shared responsibility among schools, students, parents, community and the state.
- Instruction in the basic skills is primarily the responsibility of elementary and secondary educational institutions with support from other sectors of society.
- All training should be provided in an equitable and accessible manner.
- Collaborative efforts among agencies, educational institutions, businesses and labor provide an efficient way for schools to take advantage of existing resources in their communities.
- As part of its constitutional responsibilities, the State Board of Education must provide guidance and support for schools and other agencies to prepare young people for employment.

In its discussions, the Task Force distinguished between high school-age youth who intend to go to college and those who intend to go into the workforce immediately upon graduation. The report's recommendations also concern high school-age youth who have dropped out of school and who lack a high school diploma or its equivalent.

The report also discusses disadvantaged youth and youth who have not received the benefits of employment training in the past. The Task Force defines this population as those young people who are economically disadvantaged, non-English speaking, mentally or physically disabled, educationally disadvantaged, learning disabled or a member of a racial minority group.

In this report, the Task Force recommends that the State Board of Education revise its past policies on youth employment, reallocate existing resources and encourage new programs to support schools in preparing their students for employment. The report begins with an overview of existing State Board policies regarding youth education and employment. Specific recommendations for changes follow including:

1. The State Board of Education should set statewide goals and standards in basic skills for all grades.
2. The State Board should include employability skills as a basic skill in the state's Basic Skills Improvement Policy.

3. The State Board should provide the leadership and financial support needed for out-of-school youth employment preparation programs.

4. The State Board of Education should actively encourage the development of educational partnerships at state and local levels.

5. The State Board should ensure that all young people have equal access to and equity in programs which prepare them for employment.

6. The State Board should ensure internal and external coordination of a comprehensive policy on the preparation of youth for employment.

Members of Task Force are convinced that, if implemented, their recommendations will significantly improve the education of youth for employment and contribute to the economic vitality of the Commonwealth.

REVIEW OF THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION'S YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION POLICIES

By statute, the State Board of Education is charged with the responsibility "to support, serve and plan general education in the public schools." Included in this responsibility is preparing youth for employment. As stated in the Board's 1971 "Educational Goals for Massachusetts:"

> Education should provide the learner with skills, experience and attitudes, and the guidance for initial job placement; it is equally important for the learner to develop a capacity to adapt to changing conditions.

Over the years, the Board has elaborated the goal of preparing youth for employment through a series of policy statements. Most important are the policies on Occupational Education (1976) and Guidance and Counseling (1978), and the Governor's Youth Action Plan (1979). In addition, Regulations adopted pursuant to Chapter 622 of the Acts of 1971 (1975) and the most recent statement of the Board's "Continuing Objectives" (1982-87) speak directly to an ongoing concern to ensure that schools adequately prepare youth for employment.

According to the Board's policy on Occupational Education, schools are expected to educate students in the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to determine and achieve fulfilling career goals. This means that education for the world of work should include:

- The ability to compute and communicate;
- An understanding of one's talents and interests;
- The capacity to work with others to accomplish tasks;
- An understanding of the conditions, requirements and benefits of the world of work and enterprise;
- The ability to understand and select from a range of career opportunities; and
- The general and specialized skills required for employability in a changing economy where skills are increasingly required for several work fields during a career.

Thus, the Board has translated its goals to prepare youth for employment into a combination of requirements that include a sound general education, instruction in attitudes and understanding of the world of work, and skill specific training.

The Board's position paper on Guidance and Counseling states that guidance services, to be effective, should include both career counseling and job placement services. It particularly stresses the need to work with students who intend to enter the job market immediately upon graduation from high school.

Furthermore, the Board insists that these educational opportunities be open to all students. Chapter 622 of the Acts of 1971 states that no public school may exclude a person from any course, activity, service or resource available on account of race, color, sex, religion or national origin. The Regulations implementing Chapter 622 specifically forbid discrimination in admitting students to courses of study and in promoting guidance services which represent the broad spectrum of career and educational options.

The Governor's Youth Action Plan was both developed and endorsed jointly by the State Board of Education and the Governor. It views the preparation of youth for employment within the broader framework of the community at large. The Plan seeks to focus resources on populations in special need and promote the collaborative use of resources in meeting those needs.

In 1979, the State Board approved a Basic Skills Improvement Policy requiring local school committees to establish minimum standards for basic skills competency in reading, mathematics, writing and listening, and to evaluate students in such competencies. In its recent statement of "Continuing Objectives," the Board further relates this policy to strengthening the transition from school to work by encouraging greater involvement by the business sector in assisting students to meet minimum basic skills standards.

Together, these Board statements constitute a long standing concern with developing and refining a state youth education and employment policy. In essence, the Board's policies confirm that public education is responsible for preparing young people for work, that both basic skills and the knowledge and attitudes needed to determine and achieve career goals are essential to preparing youth for employment, that priorities exist in allocating existing resources especially to populations that face barriers to employment, and that coordination between schools and agencies within the broader community is essential in delivering appropriate services.

RECOMMENDATION #1

REFORM OF BASIC SKILLS POLICY

THE TASK FORCE RECOMMENDS THAT THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION SET STATEWIDE GOALS AND STANDARDS IN BASIC SKILLS FOR ALL GRADES.

Young people must have a foundation in basic academic skills to be prepared and qualified for employment upon leaving high school. Furthermore, given the State's rapidly changing economy, young people must also possess certain basic skills which will enable them to continue to learn new tasks and jobs throughout their lives.

Schools are responsible for instructing students in the basic academic skills and, therefore, for providing a foundation which will prepare youth for employment. However, statements of the business community indicate that schools are not adequately preparing young people for employment in today's workforce. For example, a recent national survey, conducted by the New York-based Center for Public Resources, concluded that high school graduates are unprepared for employment due to weaknesses in basic skills competencies. Seventy-five percent of the businesses surveyed reported that they were forced to make substantial expenditures to provide remedial training in the basic skills.

Massachusetts businesses have voiced a similar concern in recent testimony before the Joint Education Committee on the need for statewide educational standards and testing. Roderick M. MacDougall, Chairman of the Bank of New England, noted that "an embarrassingly large percentage of the graduates from our public schools seeking to enter the workforce have inadequate basic skills in written and oral communication and quantitative analysis to carry out effectively the most elementary duties." Similar testimonies noted that public schools hold the major responsibility for ensuring that their students graduate with sufficient academic competencies for entry-level positions in the workforce, and recommended that statewide educational standards and testing be used to ensure that all young people obtain the basic skills necessary to survive in today's labor market.

The Task Force recognizes that many school districts in Massachusetts do provide their students with excellent training in the basic skills. The adequacy of basic skills programs, however, varies throughout the Commonwealth. In addition, school districts do not have a standard against which they can measure the performance of their students in the basic skills. Therefore, the Task Force recommends, as its most important directive, that the State Board of Education revise its Basic Skills Improvement Policy to provide direction and guidance on standard levels of competency which all Massachusetts public

school graduates should possess. Task Force members recommend that the State Board take the following specific actions:

1. Establish statewide goals and standards in basic skills for all grade levels. In particular, the Board should determine the level of competency desired for reading, computation, communication skills (writing and speaking), citizenship, employability skills, reasoning skills and computer literacy.

2. Require the development and approval of local school district plans for achieving state goals in the basic skills.

3. Test for satisfactory achievement of goals at the elementary, middle and high school grade levels.

4. Require that satisfactory achievement in basic skills competency be a criterion for grade promotion and graduation.

5. Provide programmatic direction and financial support to those school districts whose students, on the average, fall below state standards in basic skills.

With these goals in mind, the Task Force fully recognizes that the achievement of the goals is a developmental process. Implementation will require both time and resources to establish appropriate norms, to develop valid test instruments, and to ensure that students are tested on objectives actually covered in the classroom.

Defining statewide standards in the basic skills focuses upon only a part of the instructional program in schools -- namely, on competencies necessary for entry-level employment upon graduation from high school. Such policy is not meant to replace the broader expectations of parents and educators for school curriculum which prepares students to enter college, nor is it a substitute for specific skill training in the area of vocational education. Rather, the policy is intended to ensure that all students are competent upon graduation from high school for entry-level positions and for continued learning at the workplace.

RECOMMENDATION # 2

SCHOOL-TO-WORK APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS

THE TASK FORCE RECOMMENDS THAT THE STATE BOARD INCLUDE EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS AS A BASIC SKILL IN THE STATE'S BASIC SKILLS IMPROVEMENT POLICY.

Obtaining employment upon high school graduation requires not only a foundation in basic academic skills, but also employability skills. The Task Force broadly defines employability skills as having an understanding of the nature and demands of the workplace and of the behaviors required for employment. Young people need to know about the kinds of employment opportunities which are available to them, the kinds of training or skills necessary for different types of employment, and the kinds of functions and responsibilities required of specific occupations, so that they may seek training in the specific skills demanded by a particular job. In addition, students must learn about the appropriate work habits and attitudes which employers look for in hiring employees.

Schools are responsible for helping young people make a successful transition from school to employment. While this applies to all students, including college bound students, this help is particularly important for non-college bound students in comprehensive high schools. In Massachusetts, over 40% of high school graduates seek employment immediately upon graduation. For this population of students, preparation for work must occur almost exclusively during their elementary and secondary school experience.

The Task Force recommends that the State Board include employability skills as one of the basic skills required of all students in the state's Basic Skills Improvement Policy. The Board's policy on Occupational Education already describes the specific employability skills which students should learn at different grade levels (see Appendix B). The Board should review and revise, as necessary, this section of the policy on Occupational Education and incorporate it into the Basic Skills Improvement Policy.

The Task Force recognizes that schools can provide employability skills training in many ways:

- Responsible students will become responsible employees. Schools which will not accept tardiness or absenteeism without reason, which demand accuracy of assignments and class presentations, which involve students in decision-making, and which develop and enforce codes of conduct, are teaching their students to be responsible adults.

- Students frequently learn about the requirements of the world of work through the information or misinformation of their peers. Schools, consequently, need to involve parents, industry and labor in helping students obtain accurate information and perceptions of job requirements. Parents can provide sources of information on jobs and help their children develop responsible work habits. Business and labor can help by providing realistic information to schools on occupational requirements and employer expectations. Business and labor can also contribute by sponsoring work-study or apprenticeship opportunities, where students can learn firsthand about the world of work and about the attitudes and responsibilities expected of both employers and employees.

- School districts can require their guidance counselors to provide job placement counseling and other services to help students be prepared for employment. The State Board and Board of Regents of Higher Education can develop and support inservice training programs to help guidance counselors learn job placement counseling skills through access to Commonwealth Inservice Institute funding.

Financial support for local initiatives such as these was once provided through federal funds and, in particular, funds provided by the Career Education Incentive Act and Title IVD of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. With the consolidation of these programs into the Block Grant, the Board must reconfirm its priorities in this area and determine the level of support which should be directed to this subject area. The Task Force recommends that the Department develop a plan for support to school districts in providing orientation to employment programs and services. Such a plan should indicate the means by which the Department will provide technical support to schools in developing ways to meet goals for employability skills. At a minimum, the plan should include the following measures:

- provide mini-grants for school districts to increase students' employability skills, with support for these grants from federal funds including Chapter II of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act, Education of the Handicapped Act and the Vocational Education Act;

- include the responsibility for providing technical assistance on employability skill training as part of the job description of the state's Basic Skills Coordinators;

- collaborate with the Department of Employment Security and the Massachusetts Occupational Information Coordinating Committee in providing an occupation information system at each regional office, and develop a resource bank of exemplary programs in employment education;

- promote and expand in-school job exchange services in accordance with the Job Training Partnership Act;

- involve representatives of business, labor, service agencies and local government in developing programs on the transition from school to employment.

RECOMMENDATION #3

OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH

THE TASK FORCE RECOMMENDS THAT THE STATE BOARD PROVIDE FOR THE LEADERSHIP AND THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT NEEDED TO ENSURE COORDINATED JOB PREPARATION SERVICES FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH.

The State Board of Education is responsible for overseeing the preparation of all youth for employment. However, one in five youngsters in Massachusetts who enter the ninth grade never graduate. Urban school districts report much higher drop-out rates. Therefore, the State Board's responsibilities for youth employment education is particularly important for those students who have dropped out of school. The Task Force recommends that the State Board take an active leadership role in providing for financial support and coordination of job preparation services for out-of-school youth.

The state currently provides ways to ensure that students, and their parents, understand the alternatives available to them upon leaving school. As a first step to improving services for drop-outs, the Task Force recommends that the Department instruct school districts, parents and communities about their current rights and obligations. Public schools are required to take the following actions with students who show signs of dropping out of school:

- Under Chapter 766 (Special Education) Regulations, school administrators must monitor students who are chronically absent or who show multiple academic failures and consider recommending them for an evaluation. High school principals are also required to take concrete steps to notify potential drop-outs and their parents of educational services available to them before they leave school.

- Chapter 76, Section 18, of the Massachusetts General Laws gives parents of students who intend to leave school before high school graduation the right to discuss with the school committee "alternative educational or other placements" for their children.

- School superintendents must report annually to the Department of Education on the number of students sixteen years or older who have permanently left school, their reasons for leaving, and the alternative educational placement, if any, each student has taken.

The Task Force believes that schools are also responsible for trying to prevent students from dropping out of school. Students who are at risk of dropping out of school can be identified as early as the late elementary grades. The Task Force recommends that the State Board urge local school

committees to take more aggressive preventive action with students who are at risk of dropping out of school. Such initiatives, which should begin in the middle school grades, could be funded through Vocational Education, Special Education and funds from both Chapters I and II of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act or the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). Department staff members should actively help school committees establish in-school alternative education programs and support services, such as job and personal counseling services, to help prevent students from leaving school. This applies particularly to students who are handicapped or who face some other barrier to employment. In addition, school committees should involve parents in programs where they become more involved in their child's education and develop a greater sense of responsibility for their future.

Students who leave school often lose direct access to the programs and services which will prepare them for employment. Although school drop-outs will be eligible for Adult Basic Education Programs and for employment preparation programs sponsored by other agencies, especially those funded by JTPA, there currently is no systematic way of identifying those who need such programs.

The Task Force recommends that local school committees take the initiative to work with the Private Industry Council which is responsible for JTPA programs in their region, and with other agencies interested in helping out-of-school youth, to develop a process to identify youth in their community who are in need of employment preparation programs. In addition, the Task Force recommends that local school committees ensure that programs offered by other agencies in their communities include the educational components needed to prepare out-of-school youth for employment.

There is nothing to prevent a school system from providing free public education to youth who have dropped out of school. In fact, under Chapter 766, any student who does not have a high school diploma or its equivalent is entitled to recieve services through age 21. However, for many school drop-outs, the traditional school setting has not been a successful experience and returning to a regular school program presents an unattractive option. Therefore, the Task Force recommends that the State Board provide the leadership for local communities to create alternative educational settings through competency-based high school diploma programs, General Educational Development Test preparation programs, labor apprenticeship programs, vocational education programs, and award of academic credit for competencies acquired in the workplace.

RECOMMENDATION #4

EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

THE TASK FORCE RECOMMENDS THAT THE STATE BOARD ENCOURAGE THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS BY SUPPORTING SCHOOL-BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS; BY ENSURING INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION ON PROGRAMS WHICH PREPARE YOUNG PEOPLE FOR WORK; AND BY CREATING A LIAISON BETWEEN THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION AND THE BOARD OF REGENTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

Schools cannot successfully prepare youth for work without the help of others in the community. Schools need to work with business, industry and labor, colleges and universities, and community and volunteer agencies to define the educational needs of their students, to pool resources in developing alternative programs, to avoid duplicating efforts, and to build a broad base of support in their communities and in policy making bodies for job preparation programs.

Educational partnerships which support educational and job training programs can take place under a variety of arrangements. The Task Force cites three examples: school-business partnerships; state level interagency collaboratives; and a liaison between the Board of Education and the Board of Regents of Higher Education. At a minimum, these three educational partnerships are essential to providing effective youth education and employment programs.

School-Business Partnerships

A youth education and employment policy cannot be built apart from the support of the business community. Massachusetts schools and business both benefit by creating effective school-business partnerships. Schools need the general support of business in a community, and its specific direction on the types of programs that are best suited for preparing students for employment. Massachusetts businesses, on the other hand, have a vested interest in the quality of students graduating from the state's public schools since both employees and employers want to live in a state that provides adequate educational opportunities for their children and for future workers.

Close ties between schools and the workplace also benefit students. We know from the experience of vocational education that student employability is enhanced by the close working relationship that exists between the vocational education system and the business community. In addition, effective employment training and service programs normally operate in conjunction with employers and sometimes with labor unions. In recommending increased support for current Department efforts at helping local schools create partnerships with the business community, the

Department is, in effect, attempting to expand the experience of vocational and training programs to general education.

The Department has already begun a serious initiative to promote local school-business partnerships through the Partnership Office of the Bureau of Student, Community and Adult Services. This office has recently published a manual on creating school-business partnerships. The manual indicates that the definition of such partnerships should purposely be kept broad. Frequently these relationships are locally initiated and designed to match existing resources with specific local needs. A broad definition both recognizes and promotes the developmental nature of these arrangements.

Partnerships may be defined as any activity that brings together school and business people to address educational issues. Locally, school-business partnerships range from formal agreements--for example, those existing between major Boston area companies and Boston high schools under the Boston Compact--to informal meetings between local school officials and local business people to discuss training needs. It is also clear that these arrangements are widespread in the Commonwealth.

The manual also describes current partnership arrangements as:

- providing a community centered forum for planning and solving educational issues with broad participation by community people including representatives of local government, labor, human service agencies and volunteer organizations; and

- employing collaborative strategies, involving work among equals in solving problems and resulting in broad support for educational activities.

The Task Force supports the Department's current efforts in the area of school-business relationships and urges the Board to increase its involvement in fostering school-business partnerships at both state and local levels.

At the State level, the Task Force recommends that the Board strengthen the role of the Department's new Partnership Office and ensure that this office coordinate with the Department of Manpower Development's Partnership Office in identifying ways of supporting local school public-private ventures. At the regional level, the Board should direct its Regional Education Councils to provide a forum for the various interested parties (including regional vocational-technical schools, community colleges, community-based organizations, business, labor and regional office staff of other state agencies) in developing ways to meet educational and training needs. Planning and developmental activities should be done as much as possible in coordination with the Private Industry Council of the area.

Task Force members believe that owners of small businesses especially are not aware of the training capabilities of the educational institutions in their area. As a first step toward improving local communication, members recommended that each Regional Education Council host a meeting for Superintendents, Private Industry Council representatives and designated economic groups to discuss training needs and partnership arrangements. Also, members recommended that communications between business and comprehensive high schools could be increased by encouraging such high schools to appoint Business Advisory Councils. The Councils would provide advice to schools on ways to provide students with employment training and information on their future training needs.

State Leadership and Coordination

The Task Force recommends that at the state level, the Board initiate a plan to provide coordination among the various agencies that provide services to prepare young people for employment. Currently, there are several state agencies, in addition to the Board of Education, which provide such services. For example, the Governor, through his Secretary of Economic Affairs, supervises the administration of programs for the economically disadvantaged sponsored under the Job Training Partnership Act. The Board of Regents of Higher Education, through its system of community colleges, provides occupational training through degree and certificate programs. The Bay State Skills Corporation, a quasi-public agency created by the Legislature, finances employment training programs for youth and adults. The Department of Youth Services provides for the education of youthful offenders. Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission provides job training, counseling and placement services for disabled youth in transition to adulthood. While these and other agencies represent a rich array of services at the state level working to prepare young people for employment, there is no mechanism for coordinating their activities and efficiently combining their resources.

Task Force members agree that youth employment preparation programs would be improved by developing a mechanism and set of operating procedures at the state level for coordinating activities among agencies that prepare youth for employment.

The Task Force recommends that State Board of Education petition the Governor to create a State Youth Council for Education and Employment. The function of the Council would be to identify special populations in need, and to develop recommendations concerning allocation of state resources, program strategies, and funding to the chiefs of participating agencies. Ideally, the work of the Council would be to develop a comprehensive youth policy for Massachusetts. The Council would:

- conduct an analysis of the at-risk population (including drop-outs, youthful offenders, the handicapped, etc.) to

determine what services are currently provided for them and what ways state agencies could work together to improve programs;

- o develop an inventory of existing resources and programs to meet the needs of unemployed youth; and

- o develop an overall plan for working with unemployed youth, including specific recommendations for inter-agency coordination in the provision of needed services and programs.

Board of Education and Board of Regents of Higher Education Liaison

The State Board of Education and the Board of Regents of Higher Education share a responsibility for the education of the citizens of the Commonwealth from kindergarden through graduate school. Services to students and the effectiveness of each of the Boards will be enhanced through their close cooperation. The Boards held a joint meeting on June 14, 1983 in recognition of their mutual interdependence. To foster and further develop such cooperation, the Task Force recommends that:

- o staff of the respective agencies meet regularly to form a subcommittee on youth employment preparation and other matters of mutual concern;

- o included in the list of topics for mutual coordination should be the following issues as they relate to youth education and employment: the effect of the Regents' admissions policy on the curriculum in vocational-technical high schools; articulation within vocational education programs; sharing of resouces including facilities, faculty and joint programs; and teacher and counselor pre- and inservice training programs.

- o the Board of Education and the Board of Regents of Higher Education meet jointly as Boards at least once each year. At this time the subcommittee formed by the two Boards will report on joint efforts to improve programs which prepare young people for employment.

RECOMMENDATION #5

EQUITY, ACCESS AND JOB TRAINING

THE TASK FORCE RECOMMENDS THAT THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION ENSURE THAT ALL YOUTH HAVE EQUAL ACCESS TO AND EQUITY IN PROGRAMS WHICH PREPARE YOUNG PEOPLE FOR EMPLOYMENT.

Discrimination occurs not only when a person is denied a job unfairly, but also as a result of a combination of factors converging on employment. Young people who have been denied training in basic skills or employment preparation are educationally handicapped and, as a result, may be unable to compete for employment opportunities. Women, the handicapped, racial and linguistic minorities, and the economically disadvantaged face the same barriers to training opportunities as they face to employment. The Task Force urges that equal opportunity for students in programs that prepare youth for employment be a Board priority.

When dealing with discrimination in educational programs, the goal should not be solely to prevent discrimination. The Task Force believes that affirmative steps need to be taken in guaranteeing equal opportunity to those for whom its benefits have traditionally been denied. Frequently, handicapped youth and others denied equal employment opportunities need personal reinforcement that they will be able to succeed like others. Special outreach efforts in educational and training programs are particularly critical in building confidence as well as ability among discriminated groups. On the other hand, when attempting to achieve equal accessibility, programs and activities should be viewed in their entirety. Modifications are justified when no other equally effective means is available to achieve accessibility. In effect, the Task Force urges the State Board to continue its characteristic proactive stance in matters of equity of access when addressing youth education and employment issues and apply a principle of reasonable accommodation in discussing actual programs.

Specifically, the Task Force stresses that standards for basic skills competencies should apply to all students, including students in high school vocational programs and students with particular handicaps. Members are concerned that while vocational-technical schools do a superb job in preparing young people for work, as evidenced by the high employment rate of most graduates, the training they provide in basic skills is inadequate. This is supported by a recent Department-conducted study in which vocational-technical high school graduates reported that the quality of their academic training lagged behind their technical preparation.

Members also are concerned that students with special needs are graduating from high school without basic academic skills, thus leaving such students with an additional handicap. While the methods of instruction may require modification, handicapped students should be expected to acquire the same basic skills as all other students. Handicapped youth should be expected to take the basic skills tests except where exempted under state regulations.

In addition to equal opportunity to programs, the Task Force recommends that the State Board take a proactive approach to providing such opportunities. For example, schools must be encouraged to hire staff representative of both sexes and all ethnic backgrounds, as well as staff who are disabled, who can provide positive career role models for their students.

The Task Force recognizes that many school districts are taking positive actions to promote and encourage participation by all students in their academic programs. In order to determine the level of effort in this area, as well as ensure that all students continue to have access to, and equity in, employment and education programs, the Task Force proposes that the State Board initiate a system to monitor progress in this area. The Board should direct the Commissioner to review and report annually on the following:

- access to job training and basic skill training for all students in comprehensive and vocational-technical high schools;
- admissions to vocational-technical high schools; and
- efforts by local school districts to reduce school drop-out populations and to develop alternative high school and work-related activities for out-of-school youth.

The annual report should include a review of local school district progress in providing opportunity and access for populations traditionally denied access to employment preparation programs, including women, handicappped persons, and racial and linguistic minorities. The report should also include the Department's recommendation for any necessary program initiatives to meet their special needs.

RECOMMENDATION #6

ROLE OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

THE TASK FORCE RECOMMENDS THAT THE STATE BOARD DEVELOP A MECHANISM TO ENSURE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COORDINATION OF A PROGRAM WHICH PREPARES YOUNG PEOPLE FOR EMPLOYMENT.

The Board of Education supports a number of programs designed to prepare young people for employment. These include:

- a statewide basic skills improvement program;
- vocational education and training programs;
- the development of alternative high school education programs through Adult Basic Education or Special Education programs; and
- regional coordination services provided under the Job Training Partnership Act.

The Department of Education has the staff and resources to support initiatives in the area of youth employment. However, the Task Force proposes that the Department can improve the overall internal coordination of its support, and provide for appropriate representation of the Department in interagency negotiations, through the following structure:

1. Appointment of a high level manager to:
   - represent the Commissioner on all interagency activities related to youth employment;
   - oversee the implementation of recommendations listed in this report that are approved by the Board;
   - work with the Associate Commissioners in applying needed resources to particular problems;
   - provide for consultants and other resources to work with central and regional center office staff on youth employment preparation programs; and
   - work with Department staff members and other state agencies to develop needed policy on all aspects of youth employment including labor laws, career education, alternative high school diploma programs, etc.
2. Creation of an interagency specialist position in each regional office to work with organizations in the region to design and deliver employment education and training programs.

3. A charge to the Regional Education Councils to advise and assist outside agencies and groups on ways to improve youth employment preparation programs in their area.

4. Requirement of the Department to prepare an annual report to the State Board of Education on the progress of state and local efforts in achieving the objectives approved by the Board related to youth education and employment.

APPENDIX A

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Task Force's recommendations to the State Board of Education for policy changes and further improvements follow:

1. The State Board of Education should set statewide goals and standards in basic skills for all grades:

   - The Board should determine the level of competency desired for reading, computation, communication skills (writing and speaking), citizenship, employability skills, reasoning skills and computer literacy.

   - The Board should require local school districts to develop plans for meeting basic skills goals to be approved by the State Department of Education.

   - The Board should require schools to test for satisfactory achievement in the basic skills at the elementary, middle and high school grade levels.

   - The Board should require satisfactory achievement in the basic skills as a criterion for grade promotion and graduation.

   - The Board should provide the program direction and financial support to districts who fall below the state standards in basic skills.

2. The State Board should include employability skills as a basic skill in the state's Basic Skills Improvement Policy:

   - The Department should develop an implementation plan to affirm the Board's support for employability skills programs. Such a plan should include the provision of technical assistance and grants to schools, the development of resources and programs, and the creation of a regional framework to promote broad based participation and support in youth employment programs.

3. The State Board should provide the leadership and financial support needed for out-of-school youth employment preparation programs:

   - The Department of Education should instruct school districts and parents about their current obligations for school drop-outs.

- The Board should encourage local school districts to provide drop-out prevention programs beginning in the middle schools.

- School committees should work with other local agencies and area Private Industry Councils to establish a process for coordinating programs for out-of-school youth in their community.

4. The State Board of Education should actively encourage the development of state and local educational partnerships:

   - The State Board should support school-business partnerships by providing leadership through the Department's Partnership Office; by strengthening its relationship with the Department of Manpower Development's Partnership Office and with business; and by developing regional mechanisms to encourage local school-business relationships.

   - The State Board should support coordination and partnership with other state agencies which provide youth employment programs by petitioning the Governor to create a State Youth Council for Education and Employment.

   - The State Board should encourage coordination between elementary and secondary education and higher education by forming a subcommittee with the Board of Regents on joint concerns including youth employment and education.

5. The State Board should ensure that all young people have equal access to and equity in programs which prepare them for employment:

   - The Department should ensure that standards for basic skills apply to all students including those in vocational-technical high schools and those with special needs.

   - The Board should initiate a system to monitor the progress of school districts in providing equal opportunity and access to youth employment preparation programs and services.

6. The State Board should ensure internal and external coordination of a comprehensive policy on youth employment preparation:

   - A manager should be appointed to oversee the implementation of youth education and employment policies of the Board.

- The Board should create an interagency specialist in each regional office to foster employment education programs.

- The Board should charge Regional Education Councils to help improve youth employment programs in the region.

- The Board should require the Department to submit an annual report on youth education and employment efforts including progress in providing equal opportunity.

APPENDIX B

EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES FOR OCCUPATIONAL EDUCATION

- In elementary school, students should acquire an awareness and understanding of the world of work, a positive self concept, an understanding of themselves and others, and basic communication skills.

- In middle or junior high school, students should explore the benefits and requirements of a broad range of occupations; begin to develop educational plans for a broad choice of career goals; and have acquired communication and computation skills permitting them to take advantage of a full range of options.

- In high school, students should at least have acquired basic employability skills common to a broad range of occupations, preparation necessary for entry or specialization into a specific occupation or cluster of occupations or for pursuing postsecondary education, an understanding of economic and consumer knowledge, and communication and computation skills necessary for further education or success in the world of work.

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The Northeast Regonal Exchange, Inc. (NEREX), a private not-for-profit corporation, is a service agency that promotes educational equity and improvement. NEREX coordinates resources and sharing of information among the seven states of the northeast based on an established set of state and regional priorities. Through NEREX, states are able to expand their available resource base and work through regional sharing efforts toward program improvement.

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